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UNCLAS BRATISLAVA 000981

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SENSITIVE

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TAGS: PHUM PGOV KDEM SOCI LO

SUBJECT: NO ROMA CANDIDATES WON IN SLOVAK REGIONAL ELECTIONS

REF: BRATISLAVA 948

SENSITIVE BUT UNCLASSIFIED -- PLEASE PROTECT ACCORDINGLY

1. (SBU) SUMMARY: The National Democratic Institute (NDI) in Slovakia continues to invest considerable time and effort towards the development of viable Roma political candidates. Their latest project -- training Roma candidates in Slovakia's November 26 regional elections (reftel) -- yielded 6 active Roma candidates who ran in various Slovak regions. Most successful was Peter Pollak, a candidate NDI felt best utilized the lessons taught in their seminars. Other candidates took their training less seriously and fared poorly; NDI hopes that this will serve as a "wake-up call" to Roma candidates in the next election cycle that their lessons of campaign organization, voter outreach, and communication must be heeded if Roma candidates are to transform themselves into a viable political force within mainstream parties, rather than as independents or members of Roma parties. END SUMMARY.

THE MAKING OF A ROMA CANDIDATE

2. (SBU) The National Democratic Institute in Slovakia has dwindled to a two-person staff working on one very meaningful project: political training for Roma candidates. The training, which focuses on developing basic political skills such as voter outreach, media strategy, and image crafting, saw five graduates enter the race for regional parliamentary seats in the November 26 election (reftel). Three of the candidates ran as independent candidates, including Peter Pollak, the candidate identified by NDI as the one who most comprehensively implemented the lessons he had learned and who fared best in the polls as a result. One ran with a coalition of mainstream parties; two others ran as candidates of a Roma political party.

3. (SBU) NDI believes that the 2005 regional election cycle was the most successful for the Roma community in recent years, despite the fact that no Roma candidates were elected to office. NDI noted some positive trends: a) the smaller number of candidates avoided "splitting the vote" as the plethora of candidates in 2001 regional elections had done; b) the emergence of cooperation between mainstream parties -- particularly Smer -- and Roma candidates. In particular, NDI was pleased with the professionalism and respect displayed by Zdenko Trebula, the HZD-Smer coalition candidate for Zupan (governor) of Kosice. Trebula pledged to work with the candidates regardless of the outcomes; the candidates returned the favor by campaigning for Trebula before the December 10 run-off election, which he won.

THE CASE OF PETER POLLAK

4. (SBU) Independent candidate Peter Pollak came closest to winning a seat in one of Slovakia's regional parliaments. An NDI score-card lists his impressive accomplishments. Pollak:

- Ran the best and most professional Roma campaign in history, organizing a large team including a campaign manager, and 70 volunteers from all 20 Roma settlements in his region;
- Developed effective campaign literature and "message;"
- Focused on direct voter contact.
- Managed to get the highest number of votes in the history of Roma candidates, missing the mandate by only 178 votes;
- Finished eighth out of 54 candidates (the top seven candidates won seats in the parliament);
- Finished higher than current SDKU MP Karol Mitrik;
- Received the highest tally of votes of any candidate in six of 36 municipalities;
- Is the first substitute in the event a seat becomes vacant in his electoral district;

5. (SBU) Pollak's campaign was also noteworthy in that it motivated 2500 of his district's 7000 Roma voters, a turnout of 35.7 percent in a region where only 19.2 percent of the

general population came to the polls on election day. However, NDI noted that Pollak failed to target urban (more integrated) Roma, and was more successful in settlements.

HOW RUSKO STOLE CHRISTMAS FROM POLLAK

16. (SBU) Poloff met separately with Alexander Patkolo of the Roma Initiative, a former political operative close to Meciar's HZDS party who has since abandoned the formal relationship with HZDS in favor of an informal relationship with ANO. However, Patkolo said that they are now interested

in reaching out to SDKU, and requested that the Ambassador put in a good word for his organization with Dzurinda. He boasted that his group has data showing that they would bring 2 - 3 percent of the general electorate with them in next year's elections.

17. (SBU) Patkolo, however, may not be the best person to identify what the Roma community needs. While NDI is hopeful that SDKU will work with the Roma community in the future (SDKU reportedly believes its inattention to the Roma vote was a key factor in its loss in the 2004 Presidential elections), it is wary of Patkolo. During Pollak's campaign, Patkolo allegedly came in to the region with a large amount of ANO money which he used to "buy" votes and draw voters away from NDI's Roma candidates. Patkolo's money had another adverse effect, as well: it propelled another Roma candidate into Pollak's race, where the candidate -- they mayor of a large Roma community -- discouraged his citizens from voting for Pollak. According to NDI, had Pollak performed better in that community, he would have won office; they see this as another illustration that Roma communities still spend too much time, energy, and money fighting with each other to organize a unified, successful "Roma party."

WHERE TO GO FROM HERE

18. (SBU) NDI's political training was funded from National Endowment for Democracy (NED) money this year, but NDI officials tell us that an increase in funding would directly correspond to an increase in the number of Roma candidates they could begin preparing for elections at all levels of government. Not discouraged in the least by the results of the regional elections, NDI plans to build upon the lessons learned by their candidates as they move forward, and hope that they can increase the attention mainstream parties pay to the Roma community. NDI says many of the campaign staff for Patkolo and others have expressed an interest in becoming candidates for the December 2006 municipal elections, and were emboldened by meetings they hosted for their candidates with SDKU Vice Chairman Milan Hort and KDH Chairman of Parliament Pavol Hrusovsky, who were reportedly impressed with the candidates, asking NDI after where they found "these great Roma." In the meantime, NDI says that -- with continued funding -- they will work to identify, train, and develop Roma who are already members of mainstream Slovak parties.

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